



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** **16 – 22 April 2012**



16 Apr 1916 **The Lafayette Escadrille was established** as a squadron of mostly American volunteer pilots flying and fighting for the French Air Service during World War I. The planes, mechanics, and the pilot uniforms were French, as was the commander, Captain Georges Thenault. The squadron was originally named the *Escadrille Américaine*. For reasons of international diplomacy, the unit was re-named to honor the French military hero who aided the American Army during the American Revolution.



18 Apr 1943 **Yamamoto Shootdown.** Flying P-38 aircraft over Bougainville Island, 1st Lt. Rex T. Barber and Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., intercepted and shot down a Japanese bomber carrying Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. The interception, meticulously planned and executed on the first anniversary of the Doolittle raid, deprived the Japanese of one of their most brilliant naval officers. Major John W. Mitchell led the flight of 16 P-38s in which Barber and Lanphier flew.

21 Apr 1948 **KEY WEST AGREEMENT.** The SECDEF issued a memo to his Secretaries with a paper defining the functions of the services and the JCS. It was the first delineation of functions drawn up after the National Security Act of 1947. The Air Force received primary responsibility for the air defense of America and the strategic nuclear bombing mission. **WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN:** The Air Force did not get carrier-based aircraft, which were retained by the Navy for naval campaigns. Since aircraft that attack ships can also attack targets on land, the agreement did not prevent a significant Air Force-Navy airpower rivalry. **WHAT DID HAPPEN:** Army and Marine Corps air capabilities were limited relative to the Air Force and the Navy. With little faith that other services would provide robust air support, the Army developed its own “air force” in the form of attack helicopters while the Marine Corps ultimately preserved its independent air wings. An effective, systematic concept for airpower unity of command was developed only after the Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986 and the creation of the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) concept.



22 Apr 1953 **New fighter mission in Korea.** Because of shortages of fighter-bombers, Fifth Air Force assigned a new mission to the F-86 Sabres of the 4th and 51st Fighter Interceptor Wings (FIWs) – armed reconnaissance of enemy lines of communication. In the photo at left, a 1954 flight of F-86 Sabres from the 51 FIW is led by the wing commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis.



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19 Apr 1967 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Major Leo K. Thorsness earned a Medal of Honor by protecting a mission to rescue downed airmen in North Vietnam. While flying an F-105 with low fuel, Thorsness shot down one MiG-17, damaged another, and drove off three more. Despite his urgent need for fuel, Major Thorsness elected to recover at a forward operating base, allowing another aircraft in emergency condition to refuel from an aerial tanker. Shortly after this incident, Thorsness was shot down, captured, and held prisoner until his release on March 4, 1973. (At right, Major Thorsness and his regular backseater, Capt. Harold Johnson. Johnson flew 93 Wild Weasel missions over North Vietnam and received the Air Force Cross).



16 Apr 1973 **USAF B-52 bombers resumed attacks against North Vietnamese positions** in Laos following reports that communist forces overran a town in the Plaine des Jarres.



17 Apr 1999 The **first RQ-1 Predator flight into a combat zone** was made during Operation ALLIED FORCE when the Predator performed reconnaissance over Serbia. (RQ-1 photo at left.)

16 Apr 2004 **MACKAY TROPHY.** Near Kharbut, Iraq, two USAF HH-60G helicopters were dispatched to rescue the crew of a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter that had crashed in a sandstorm. The brown-out conditions left the rescue crews' infrared and night vision goggles ineffective. Flying through multiple surface-to-air missile attacks, the HH-60s flew visual approaches to locate, rescue and evacuate all five Army crash survivors. For their outstanding actions, the HH-60G aircrews earned the Mackay Trophy. (See file photos below – HH-60Gs and brown-out conditions in southwest Asia.)

